

# All U.S. programs must face cuts

**T**he number 7.692 trillion is not the world's population, rather it's a projection of the federal government's spending on entitlement programs for the next five years.

Unlike spending on annually funded programs and agencies, spending on entitlement or mandatory programs — the automatic-pilot part of the federal budget — is growing rapidly every year.

We, in Congress, have the responsibility to manage federal spending so that our children and grandchildren don't shoulder overwhelming national debt for the rest of their lives.

In this budget season, we have the opportunity to put the nation's purse on Weight Watchers.

Some people mistakenly believe this nation's escalating budget is partly a result of excessive federal spending on agriculture and related programs.

Agriculture spending is broadly defined to include programs such as food stamps, child nutrition, rural development and conservation and actually accounts for only 4.7 percent of all mandatory spending programs and less than 1 percent of spending in the federal budget.

Agriculture programs help provide our country with the world's safest and most abundant food supply, which enables Americans to spend less on food than any other developed nation in the world.

Spending on farm support programs, such as those for corn and cotton, account for only 1 percent of all federal mandatory spending.

The budget request recently proposed by the Bush administration asks for agriculture to bear a disproportionate share of deficit reduction.

This includes particularly deep cuts in the carefully crafted 2002 farm bill, although most of its programs have spent much less than originally projected.

As chairman of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, I believe that lower deficits and a manageable budget are beneficial to everyone, including agriculture. I really



**SAXBY CHAMBLISS**

believe that America's farmers and ranchers are willing to pay their fair share for deficit reduction as long as other folks have to do the same.

I disagree, however, with how the president has proposed his reductions. If agriculture accounts for only 4.7 percent of mandatory spending in the federal budget, agriculture should contribute in a proportional manner. I have worked extensively this year with the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee to include a fair number for agriculture's participation based on the president's proposed budget.

The \$2.8 billion agriculture reduction over five years contained in the Senate budget resolution is a responsible way for agriculture to do its part; this figure accounts for about 4.7 percent of the president's total deficit reduction for mandatory programs.

When calculated by congressional budget experts, the president's budget request includes more than \$9.1 billion in agriculture reductions over five years.

The budget before the House of Representatives contains a nearly \$5.3 billion reduction for agriculture over five years. Compared to these numbers, the Senate's \$2.8 billion is not only responsible, it is very reasonable.

Farmers may be wondering why I agreed to any contribution to deficit reduction at all.

It might have been easier to ask the budget committee chairman to hold agriculture harmless, especially because my committee will be

responsible for identifying and making the necessary reductions when the budget process is complete.

It might have been an easier conversation over Sunday dinner when joining my family and friends involved in agriculture.

Had agriculture been singled out as the only area of the federal budget to face reductions, I would have been absolutely unwilling to accept reductions. But this has not been the case.

Health care, education, transportation and other areas of the federal budget are also being asked to play a role.

When agriculture was asked to pay more than its fair share in the budget process by the president, I did fight — not for zero reductions, but for a reasonable, proportionate share. Asking for zero reductions to agriculture in this budget environment wouldn't have been responsible, and it wouldn't have been good for agriculture long term.

These contributions to deficit reduction, spread across all non-defense areas of the federal budget, are not a penalty; they are the opportunity for us to make this nation's budget more manageable for our children and grandchildren.

As you know, it's never easy when you have to tighten your family's budget. It's a similar situation when this is done on a national scale. In an ideal world, deficits would not exist nor would the need to reduce spending. The federal budget is in need of a trim-down plan, and the responsible route is to do something about it.

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**Saxby Chambliss of Moultrie, who is in his third year as U.S. senator for Georgia, serves as chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry and also serves on the Intelligence and Armed Services committees. During his four terms in the U.S. House, Chambliss served as vice chairman of the House Budget Committee. He recently received the Friend of the Taxpayer Award.**